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U.S. Transportation Secretary LaHood Applauds Massachusetts for Tough Anti-Texting Ban

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood praised Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick for signing a tough new anti-distraction law that bans texting while driving and sets strict penalties for the practice. Massachusetts is the 29th state to ban texting behind the wheel.

“Far too often, drivers allow electronic devices to distract them from the road. For teen drivers, who are far less experienced behind the wheel, the dangers are compounded,” said Secretary LaHood. “Thanks to the bill signed into law today by Governor Patrick, Massachusetts roads will be safer for everyone.”

The new Massachusetts bill will fine adults \$100 for texting as a first offense, \$250 for a second offense, and \$500 for a third. Drivers younger than 18, if caught texting or using a cell phone while driving, will receive a \$100 fine in addition to a 60-day license suspension. In addition, they will be required to take an “attitude” course before getting their license back. A second offense for young drivers would carry a 180-day suspension and a \$250 fine. A third offense would generate a one-year suspension and a \$500 fine.

According to the latest data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), nearly 6,000 people died in 2008 in distracted driving crashes nationwide. The highest proportion of those crashes involved teen drivers, and a total of 659 teens were killed in distracted driving-related crashes.

NHTSA has developed sample legislation that states can use to craft measures banning texting behind the wheel. The sample bill is patterned after President Obama’s October 1, 2009 Executive Order prohibiting federal employees from texting while operating government-owned vehicles and equipment. Last year, more than 200 distracted driving

bills were under consideration by state legislatures, and the pace has increased markedly this year.

Recently, Secretary LaHood launched pilot programs in New York and Connecticut as part of a “Phone in One Hand. Ticket in the Other.” campaign to study whether increased enforcement and public awareness can reduce distracted driving behavior.

For more information on distracted driving and the Department of Transportation’s work, visit www.distraction.gov.

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